

Improving Communicative English Skills- Verbal

Miriam Paul Sreeram

Scientist, CMFRI

Email: miriampaul@yahoo.com

English is a global communicative medium, the knowledge of which opens doors to enhanced career opportunities. In the cent per cent literate Kerala, the ability to express oneself in English gives an added advantage to prospective employees and entrepreneurs. In a world which is increasingly more networked and technologically advanced, a good grasp of English is becoming increasingly imperative. A plethora of employment sectors, especially health, hospitality, tourism and education, which employ a maximum of women in Kerala require employees and entrepreneurs conversant with English. Primary and secondary schooling provides most with the opportunity to assimilate at least a very basic knowledge of English but as in the case of all languages it is the continued and enhanced usage of English which equips a person with the expertise which is required in practical situations. The role of Communicative English is to provide for such basic experience and confidence to develop good communication skills by multi-sensorial and multi-modal learning through non-conversational, conversational and theatrical exercises.

What's and whys of Communicative English

Development of communicative skills requires competence in five areas:

- Listening
- Understanding
- Speaking
- Reading
- Writing

In order to become an effective user of English, the student has to work on each of these skills to gradually build up confidence which comes only from repetitive and improved usage.

The Communicative method is employed to accomplish this in a relative shorter period of time, as opposed to years of study of the language. The emphasis is more on colloquial usage for everyday situations and effective communication of ideas, feelings or information without relying heavily on grammatical and literary considerations. Communicative methods rely on interaction as the main platform for skill development.

Mastering communicative skills can be likened to building a house. The basic requirements are a vocabulary and understanding of grammatical usage. Words are the building bricks and grammar the cement that holds the words together. Building up a minimal vocabulary and the correct usage in simple sentences are the first steps. Further competence in developing correct pronunciation, using idioms and phrases, metaphors and similar and

other higher nuances in literature can be compared to interior decoration and furnishing of the house- the more competence acquired, the more grand the final structure will be. Short term communicative English courses concentrate on equipping the student with a basic vocabulary and understanding of grammar which will make them proficient in dealing with ordinary situations, especially in the workplace.

How do we proceed with Communicative English?

Situational exercises in the four areas of skill development are used to create a preliminary understanding and practical usage of English. The exercises are held at five levels:

- Introductory exercise: Developing the ability to describe oneself or others
- Conversational exercises: Holding simple conversations with others
- Directive exercises: Instructing or directing others to perform tasks
- Narrative exercises: Describing events, concepts or situations
- Creative exercises: Applying ones imaginative and artistic skills effectively in English

As expression is a direct measure of confidence, these simple exercises concentrate on developing the practical application of the five communicative skills in as short a time as possible. The key to competence is repetition; the more the student practices the language, the more expertise and confidence she gains.

Introductory exercise:

The first lesson in learning any language, including English, lies in identifying oneself and one's immediate antecedents. This is done in a few simple sentences. The sentences can be written in Malayalam and translated to English.

Conversational exercise: The students are encouraged to form small groups and hold conversations with simple questions and answers.

Directive exercise:

An extension of the above exercise, this lesson will enable the student in making a listener achieve a goal. It involves giving instructions in simple sentences and a clear manner about undertaking a particular task or series of tasks. For example "Please shut the door and sit down." "Can you please look at your watch and tell me the time?" "Please answer the telephone".

Narrative exercise:

The students are encouraged to express their views on situations, happenings or ideas. This exercise is meant to push them into exploring their vocabulary and its appropriate usage.

Creative exercise:

This exercise is meant to bring out the full potential of the student in terms of her command over language. The capacity of the student to process, organize and express in English is accomplished.

Lesson 1:

The students are encouraged to write down sentences stating their names, place of residence and occupation and reading them aloud. They may write down the details in Malayalam and translate them into English.

Lesson 2:

Interactions between students or students and instructors by holding conversations with simple questions and answers.

Lesson 3:

Role playing by students as a teacher in a class or any other authoritative figure.

Lesson 4:

Students can be asked to write a letter answering a matrimonial advertisement. They can also be asked to express their views on a video clipping.

Lesson 5:

Students will be asked to describe an imaginary journey or will be shown a few pictures and asked to make up a story using them.